



Media Outreach Guidelines

In support of Picturing America, you may want to reach out to local reporters at your daily papers. As you do, the following tips may be helpful to keep in mind. Additionally, please feel free to contact the NEH Office of Communications for more guidance (202-606-8446), or to refer reporters to us if they have questions you do not know the answer to, or do not feel comfortable answering.

- **Background Research**

- In advance of contacting a reporter, it may be helpful to do preliminary research.
 - Determine who at the paper typically covers education, arts, schools, and/or local news.
 - If you are not familiar with the reporter, read a few samples of their past work to make sure they are the most appropriate person to contact.

- **Introduction**

Before calling a reporter, send them an E-mail with background information (the press release, fact sheet, quote sheet, and brochure). This information can be found at: <http://picturingamerica.neh.gov/media.php>. Also, be sure to include the URL to the Picturing America Web site: <http://picturingamerica.neh.gov/>. Additionally, it would be helpful to provide them with the specific number of recipients in your city and state. This information is available at: http://picturingamerica.neh.gov/public_awards.php.

If the reporter's E-mail address is not available on their paper's Web site, call the general phone number and ask. This E-mail is where you are introducing them to Picturing America and yourself. It should be brief – the goal is to provide enough information about the program to pique their interest without overwhelming them.

- Your first phone contact should serve as a follow-up to the materials you sent.
 - Introduce yourself clearly; state your name and that of your school/library.
 - Inquire as to whether or not they have time to talk.
 - If they are on deadline, ask them when you can call them back.
 - If they are available to talk, let them know that you are following up on an E-mail, indicate the day you sent the materials, and refresh their memory by giving them a brief overview of your story.
- **Avoid** reading off the press release or your E-mail verbatim.
 - **Instead:** Present your story in a conversational tone in 30 seconds or less. If they are interested, they will ask for more information – you don't have to get everything out at once. Focus on the three main points:
 1. WHO (your school or library was one of over 56,000 recipient schools and libraries)
 2. WHAT (to receive Picturing America, a free education resource from the NEH)
 3. WHY (to teach American history and culture through great American art – expand upon what this includes: 40 reproductions, illustrated teachers resource book, comprehensive website)

- **Interest & Relevance**

- Convey to the reporter why your story is of interest to their readers.
 - What does this mean for your students/ library patrons?
 - What does this mean for your community?

- **Questions**

- Leave the conversation open to questions. If the reporter asks questions, it is an indication that they are engaged.
- If you are unable to answer the reporter's questions, it is perfectly appropriate to say: "I don't have an answer to that, but will make sure to find out and get back to you." *If you feel comfortable getting the information for them, please do, if not, feel free to call us and we'll respond to them, or refer them to us directly for more information.*
 - It is imperative that their question be answered as promptly as possible.
- Make the reporter's job as easy as possible by providing all the necessary information in a few brief conversations.

- **Interview**

- Feel free to offer an interview (reporters will usually want to speak with a teacher, librarian, school administrator or even student in a face-to-face or phone interview so that they can get additional information for their story – this is the human interest aspect). When you make the initial phone call, volunteer to schedule a time to talk, given that they may not be available at that moment to do an interview.
- Accommodate the reporter's schedule as much as possible.

- **Follow-up**

- Once you have supplied the reporter with all the necessary information, you should allow time for them to complete their story.
- An E-mail or phone call to follow-up on the story is appropriate closer to the expected air/print date to determine if the story will run.
- Even if a reporter confirms your story will run, it is always possible it will be edited or cut completely. If the story isn't placed immediately, it may still be included at a later date.

- **Thank you**

- Send a thank you note or E-mail to the reporter to express gratitude for their time.
- This is especially important if your story gets placed, but equally important if the reporter has expressed particular interest or spent significant time on the story.
- This courtesy leaves a positive and lasting impression on the reporter, making them more likely to call you the next time there is an opening for a story.